



Special Report

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Democratic Accomplishments in the 111th Congress: Honoring Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Call for Change

Since the start of the 111th Congress, Democrats have worked with the Obama Administration to advance a bold, positive agenda that rebuilds and reinvests in America. President Obama's historic election has ushered in a new era for all Americans. For years, Republican leadership in Washington ignored our nation's most critical problems while at the same time creating larger ones: a financial crisis, a severe economic recession, skyrocketing costs for basic needs, cynicism about government, and a loss of respect around the world. Fed up with misplaced priorities and failed policies and ready to get the nation moving in the right direction again, last year the American people went to the polls and called for change. Democrats could not have agreed more and are now working each day to honor that call.

In 2009, Senate Democrats worked to diligently address important issues to over 16 million Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders living in the United States. [U.S. Census, [Facts for Features](#)] Senate Democrats understand there is a great amount of ethnic diversity within the Asian American and Pacific Islander community which requires a variety of legislative solutions to address the needs of this community. In 2009, Senate Democrats ensured the passage of critical legislation to:

- [Jumpstart job creation for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders;](#)
- [Stabilize the housing market;](#)
- [Secure the continuation of critical safety-net programs;](#)
- [Support small businesses to encourage economic growth;](#)
- [Secure health care for millions of additional children;](#)
- [Provide authority to the FDA to regulate the manufacture, marketing and sale of tobacco;](#)
- [Restore the American dream of home ownership and provide housing assistance;](#)
- [Support Asian American and Pacific Islander troops and military families;](#)

- [Strengthen the ability of law enforcement to investigate and prosecute hate crimes](#); and
- [Ensure fair pay for all Americans](#).

As we begin the second session of the 111th Congress, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) can be assured that Senate Democrats will continue to champion legislation that supports and encourages the continued success of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community.

See [Democratic Accomplishments in the 111th Congress: Honoring the American People's Call for Change](#) for a more detailed version of Democratic Accomplishments in the 111th Congress.

Democrats are Working to Strengthen the Economy and Jumpstart Job Creation for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

The recession is touching every community. Since the start of the recession the unemployment rate of Asian Americans has more than doubled from 3.7 percent to 7.7 percent. [Center for American Progress, [The State of Minorities in the Economy](#)] Democrats understand that too many individuals have lost their jobs through no fault of their own and need help.

Senate Democrats passed economic recovery legislation to pull the nation's economy back from the brink of disaster and onto the road to recovery. During the Bush Administration, life for millions of American families grew less affordable and less secure. In 2008, the poverty rate for Asian Americans grew to 11.8 percent, an increase of 1.6 percent since 2007. [U.S. Census, [Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage](#)] Years of misguided fiscal policies and irresponsible regulatory failures contributed to a financial meltdown that nearly crippled the national and global economy and threatened the American Dream for millions. Last January, the 111th Congress and the Obama Administration inherited an economy plagued by lower wages, fewer jobs, declining home values, foreclosures, and skyrocketing costs for basic necessities like gas, health care, and college tuition. Not since the Great Depression had the need for a strong economic recovery package been so urgent and clear.

Congress passed the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009*. The *Recovery Act* took steps to:

- ✓ Save or create an estimated 3.5 million jobs through investments in transportation, federal, housing, broadband, and environmental infrastructure; investments in state fiscal relief; investments in energy innovation; investments in health-care modernization, and tax incentives for small businesses;
- ✓ Provide the Making Work Pay tax credit for 95 percent of working families; expand the Child Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit; expand the First Time Homebuyer Tax Credit; and extend tax relief for small businesses; and
- ✓ Extend a hand of help to those Americans hardest hit by the economic crisis, investing billions in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), extension of federal emergency unemployment benefits, state fiscal relief to ensure continuation of the

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, subsidies for COBRA Continuation Coverage for unemployed workers, and relief payments for seniors, veterans and other Americans in need.

Congress passed legislation to stabilize the housing market for homeowners, renters, and lenders. As Democrats work to get the economy growing again by making long-term investments, creating jobs, providing middle-class tax relief, we have not forgotten the origin of the current recession: the crash of the home mortgage market. The 111th Congress passed the *Helping Families Save Their Homes Act* to prevent unnecessary foreclosures, improve access to affordable home loans, increase the availability of credit, protect renters, and prevent homelessness.

In 2008, more than 2.3 million U.S. properties faced foreclosure, an 81 percent increase from the previous year. This was added to the 1.3 million properties that faced foreclosure in 2007, a 75 percent increase from 2006. It is estimated that by the end of 2009, more than 40 million homeowners will have experienced a decline in their home values due to surrounding foreclosures, at a total cost of \$325 billion.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders were hit hard by predatory mortgage lending. High-cost loans accounted for 17.1 percent of loans to Asian Americans in 2004 - 2006. [[The 2007 Annual Minority Lending Report](#)]

Congress has passed legislation to ensure the continuation of critical safety-net and economic recovery programs. The Great Recession inherited by the Bush Administration was deeper and more severe than anyone – economists and elected officials alike – could have predicted. Programs that were originally set to expire have been extended to ensure that American families survive these difficult times, the economic recovery gains of the past few months are sustained, and the economy is stable. To this end Congress has taken steps to ensure the continuation of important programs. In November, Congress passed the fully-offset *Worker, Homeownership, and Business Assistance Act of 2009*.

This legislation is directly helping Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders who cannot find work. As of December 2009, Asian Americans had an increasing unemployment rate of 8.4 percent. [Bureau of Labor Statistics, [January 2010](#)] The reality for Asian American youth is even worse. In December 2009, the unemployment rate for young Asian Americans was 11.3 percent. [Center for American Progress, [The State of Minorities in the Economy](#)] The legislation specifically:

Extended unemployment insurance benefits

- ✓ Extended unemployment insurance by up to 14 additional weeks for jobless workers; and extended benefits for six additional weeks for workers in states with unemployment levels over 8.5 percent; and
- ✓ Ensured the additional \$25 per week in unemployment insurance benefits provided by the *Recovery Act* do not count against a family's eligibility for the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps.

Extended and enhanced homebuyer assistance

- ✓ Extended through April 30, 2010 the tax credit for first-time homebuyers (up to \$8,000 or up to 10 percent of the purchase price of the residence), allowing 60 days to close, provided that the homes are under a binding contract by that date;
- ✓ Provided homebuyer tax credit of up to \$6,500 to owners who have been in the same principal residence for five consecutive years during the previous eight years; and
- ✓ Increased the income limitations to \$125,000 for individuals and \$225,000 for joint filers.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders exemplify the entrepreneurial spirit of successful business leaders. In 2002, over 1 million businesses were owned by Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. [U.S. Census, [Asian/Pacific American Facts for Features](#)] The types of enterprises led by members of the community include professional, scientific and technical services, personal services, health care and social assistance, among others. These business leaders will benefit from the resources Senate Democrats secured for small businesses in the 111th Congress, initiatives that will encourage growth and job creation.

Congress approved a program to give entrepreneurs the resources they need to grow and innovate. In December, as part of the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2010*, Congress provided appropriations for the Small Business Administration to support the nation's small businesses, which have created 64 percent of new jobs in this country and are crucial to getting the nation's economy back on track. The law provided \$824 million, including \$28 million in new lending to small businesses — critically important for firms having trouble borrowing funds in the current tight credit market; \$25 million in new microlending and \$22 million in related microloan technical assistance; \$113 million for the Small Business Development Centers located throughout the country; and \$8 million for technical assistance to low-income small business owners.

In October, the Senate passed a bipartisan bill to temporarily extend the Small Business Administration's Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program. This temporary reauthorization, which extends SBIR and other programs through April 30, 2010, gives Congress more time to pass a comprehensive bipartisan bill that will strengthen and improve the SBIR program and provide long-term stability for the program.

As we move forward in the second session of the 111th Congress, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders can be assured that Senate Democrats are committed to ensuring our nation recovers from the current economic recession and Americans are able to get back to work.

Democrats are Working to Restore the American Dream for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

More Asian Americans are renting. In 2006, even before the start of the economic collapse, home purchases among Asian Americans were down more than 21 percent from the previous year. [Home Mortgage Disclosure Act data, [The 2007 Annual Minority Leading Report](#)] This was the largest decrease among the minority groups studied. These figures indicate that more

Asian Americans are relying on rental properties to provide shelter for their families and are less able to meet the high costs of home ownership.

Congress passed critical legislation to rebuild America’s communities, restore the American dream of homeownership, and provide housing assistance to Americans in need. As part of the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2010*, Congressional Democrats provided funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The bill provided:

Housing Assistance for Americans in Need

- Section 8 tenant-based rental assistance, including funding for voucher renewals, tenant protection vouchers, Veterans Affairs Housing Vouchers, family unification incremental vouchers, and family self-sufficiency coordinators;
- Project-based Rental Assistance to provide affordable housing to low-income individuals;
- Support for Public Housing Authorities to make critical repairs and improvements to public housing units and improve living conditions for residents;
- HOPE VI competitive grants to revitalize neighborhoods;
- Home Investment Partnerships Program to provide assistance to state and local governments to expand the supply and affordability of housing to low-income people; and
- Capital grants the acquisition, rehabilitation, or construction of housing for low-income seniors.

Restoring the American Dream of Homeownership

- Housing Counseling Assistance to continue pre-purchase counseling and foreclosure prevent counseling to homeowners; and
- \$233 million for the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation to counsel families in danger of losing their homes to foreclosure.

Community Development

- \$4.45 billion to fund community and economic development projects in 1,180 localities, including funding for the Sustainable Communities Initiative and the Rural Innovation Fund; and
- \$82 million for the Self-Help and Assisted Homeownership Program to assist low-income homebuyers who are willing to contribute to the building of their houses.

Democrats are Working to Ensure a Healthy America for all Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

Rising number of Asian Americans do not have health care. In 2008, 17.6 percent of Asian Americans did not have health insurance. [U.S. Census, [Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage](#)] Senate Democrats understand that this statistic is appalling. In the 111th Congress, Democrats have been working to address the high number of Asian American and Pacific Islanders living and working without any health insurance to protect their families.

Congress passed one of the most important pieces of legislation in generations: health insurance reform. The Senate bill, the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*, passed in December. The House bill, the *Affordable Health Care for America Act*, passed in November. As we take the final steps necessary to make health reform law, the American people can rest assured that Congressional Democrats are committed to ensuring they receive quality, affordable health care by:

- ✓ Eliminating gender discrimination in coverage and limiting variations based on age
- ✓ Prohibiting coverage rescissions and banning denials due to pre-existing conditions
- ✓ Providing health insurance choices to cover more than 94 percent of all legal residents under age 65 while reducing the deficit
- ✓ Extending the solvency of Medicare
- ✓ Eliminating lifetime coverage limits and restricting the use of annual limits
- ✓ Eliminating co-payments and deductibles for preventive care
- ✓ Reducing the number of uninsured by 31 million
- ✓ Reining in skyrocketing health care costs
- ✓ Making prescription drugs more affordable for seniors
- ✓ Reducing employee health care costs for small businesses

Congress overwhelmingly approved critical legislation to renew and expand the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). For the past twelve years, CHIP has played a crucial role in helping to reduce the rate of uninsured children from lower-income families. The program was set to expire in March 2009. After two years of hard work by Democrats to improve and expand health care for children, in February, the 111th Congress passed and the President signed the *Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009*, a bipartisan bill that authorizes new funding for CHIP to provide quality health care coverage for almost 11 million children. The legislation will allow 6.7 million children to continue to receive health care coverage and extend coverage to 4.1 million children who are currently uninsured. In 2008, almost 11 percent of Asian children did not enjoy the benefits of health insurance. [U.S. Census, [Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage](#)] With the passage of CHIP, many of these children will now have access to critical health care and prevention services.

The CHIP legislation will also:

- Increase and target funding for states facing budget deficits;
- Improve state tools for outreach and enrollment;
- Provide bonus payments to states enrolling the lowest-income children;

- Improve the quality of health care for low-income children;
- Help reduce racial and ethnic disparities in coverage and quality;
- Improve access to critical benefits such as dental coverage; and
- Maintain state flexibility to set eligibility levels for the program based on the cost of living in each state.

Congress strongly supported legislation to protect our children and the public from the harmful effects of tobacco use. Due to the commitment of Senate Democrats and more than ten years of hard work, legislation granting the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) the authority to regulate the manufacture, marketing, and sale of tobacco was signed into law by the President in June.

Tobacco use in the United States is killing our citizens, costing us billions of dollars in health care costs, and reducing our economic productivity. As of 2008, 15.6 percent of Asian-American men and 4.7 percent of Asian-American women smoked cigarettes. [American Lung Association, [Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders](#)]

More than 43 million Americans are addicted to cigarettes. Tobacco use kills more than 400,000 Americans each year, and an additional 50,000 non-smokers die prematurely each year due to exposure to secondhand smoke.

Nearly 90 percent of smokers begin as children and are addicted by the time they become adults. In 2006, 7.3 percent of Asian American and Pacific Islander high school students and 2.6 percent of Asian American and Pacific Islander middle school students smoked cigarettes. [American Lung Association, [Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders](#)] Each day, more than 3,500 children try smoking for the first time, and more than 1,000 children become regular, daily smokers.

Now that the *Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act* has become law, the FDA has the authority to: regulate tobacco products, restrict tobacco advertising, prevent the sale of tobacco products to youth, require stronger warning labels, prevent misrepresentation by tobacco manufacturers, remove hazardous ingredients, set standards for so-called “reduced risk” products, and ensure tobacco companies, not American taxpayers, bear the cost of regulation.

Democrats are Working to Educate Our Children and Train Our Workforce

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have unique educational needs. It is difficult to generalize about the Asian American and Pacific Islander community because of the diversity of the ethnic groups within the community. The community, as a whole, has among it both the most highly and poorly educated. Some AAPI communities struggle to succeed in the classroom due to limited English skills while other communities enjoy outstanding academic success. In 2000, while 44 percent of the Asian American community had attained a BA or higher, only 14 percent of Pacific Islanders had attained the same level of education. [CARE Report, [Figure 12](#)]

Congressional Democrats made a down-payment on educational reform by investing in our nation's most critical education programs which will serve the entire AAPI community. As part of the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2010*, Congress provided increased funding for programs under the Department of Education. The bill:

Makes College More Affordable

- The bill provides funding for the Pell Grant program. Pell grants provide need-based financial assistance to more than eight million low- and middle-income undergraduate students and their families pay for the costs of postsecondary education and vocational training. In 2008, 5.9 percent of Pell Grant recipients were Asian. [U.S. Department of Education, [National Center for Education Statistics](#)]
- The bill also invests in federal supplemental educational opportunity grants, federal work study, and the Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnerships program.

Provides Grants for Disadvantaged Students

- The bill includes \$14.5 billion for Title I grants to school districts to help 20 million disadvantaged students in nearly 55,000 public schools obtain the education skills they need to compete in the global economy.
- The bill includes another \$545 million for school improvements grants that are designated to help save 13,000 struggling schools across the country.

Supports Afterschool Programs

- The legislation provides \$1.17 billion to assist 21st Century Community Learning Centers provide a safe and supervised environment for students before and after school.

Congress invested in labor training programs aimed at helping unemployed workers survive during the economic recession and, ultimately, getting Americans back to work. As part of the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2010*, Congress provided increased funding for programs under the Department of Labor.

The appropriations legislation provides \$3.83 billion for training and employment services, including funding for: dislocated worker employment and training activities, adult employment and training state grants, youth employment and training state grants, transitional jobs, and green jobs.

Democrats are Working to Support Our Troops and Veterans

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have a strong history of bravely serving our country in the military. There are currently over 300,000 Asian American and Pacific Islanders veterans who have served in the US military. [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *Veteran Population 2007*, [Table 5L](#)] Their needs are being served by the strong leadership of Senate Democrats who are committed to ensuring that the best care and services are available to our service members and their families.

Senate Democrats led passage of a Fiscal Year 2010 defense appropriations bill that puts our troops first. In December, the Senate passed the *Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2010*, to provide critical funds in support of our troops and military families; to fund overseas operations in Iraq and Afghanistan; and to make vital investments in the health and readiness of our Armed Forces.

Congress advanced a bipartisan defense authorization bill to advance critical national security priorities. In October, the President signed the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010*. Funding provided in the bill will support critical national security priorities to:

- Provide fair compensation and first rate health care, address the needs of the wounded, ill and injured, and improve the quality of life of the men and women of the all-volunteer force (active duty, National Guard and Reserves) and their families.
- Provide our servicemen and women with the resources, training, technology, equipment (especially force protection) and authorities they need to succeed in combat and stability operations.

Congress passed legislation to support our nation's veterans, service members and their families. As part of the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2010*, Congress provided funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), for military construction and family housing, and for military construction projects in support of the war in Afghanistan. For the first time, the bill included advance appropriations to fund medical programs for the Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure a stable and uninterrupted source of funding for medical care for veterans.

The Senate passed a sweeping reform bill to improve the care of wounded veterans. Overcoming months of Republican obstructionism, the Senate passed nearly unanimously the *Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2009*. The legislation merges two veterans' health bills to establish an unprecedented permanent program to train, support, and assist the caregivers of disabled veterans; improve care for veterans in rural areas, reduce veteran homelessness, improve care for women veterans; and improve VA's ability to recruit and retain a strong workforce and provide quality assurance at its medical facilities.

There have been more than 70 Asians wounded in Operation Enduring Freedom and over 500 Asians wounded in Operation Iraqi Freedom. [Data available [here](#) and [here](#)] Senate Democrats are committed to helping these wounded soldiers recover with improved care and support.

Democrats are Working to Advance Justice and Enforce the Laws of the United States

The 111th Congress confirmed the most judicially-qualified nominee in decades to be the 111th Justice on the Supreme Court. On August 7, 2009 Senate Democrats had the unparalleled honor of confirming Second Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Sonia Sotomayor – perhaps the most judicially-qualified nominee in 70 years – to be an Associate Justice of the

United States Supreme Court. With 17 distinguished years on the bench, Justice Sotomayor is the nation's 111th Justice but only the third woman and first Latino to serve on the Court.

Her success is an inspiration to all Americans, perhaps especially to women, minorities, and all those who have had to overcome financially meager beginnings; and her confirmation to the United States Supreme Court is a testimony to the greatness of the America dream.

Congress, under the leadership of Democrats, passed legislation to strengthen law enforcement's ability to monitor, investigate, prosecute, and protect

Americans from hate crimes. As part of the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010*, Congress passed the *Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009*. The legislation recognizes that hate crimes pose serious and widespread national problems, which impact not only the actual victim but the community sharing the targeted traits of the victim, and that existing federal law is inadequate to provide assistance to states and local law enforcement in the investigation and prosecution of these crimes.

The legislation will strengthen the ability of federal, state, local, and tribal governments to investigate and prosecute hate crimes based on race, color, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability. The bill will also authorize grants to meet state, local, and tribal expenses involved in investigating and prosecuting hate crimes.

The 111th Congress passed a law to ensure fair pay for all Americans. While the battle for equality and civil rights is far from over, in January 2009, all those who believe in the promise of "equality and justice for all" achieved a major victory when President Obama signed the *Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009* into law. In doing so, Congress and President Obama ended a nearly two-year battle to overturn a Supreme Court decision that made it more difficult for victims of pay discrimination to seek redress and receive justice.

The *Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act* restored the "pay-check accrual" interpretation to ensure that employees who can prove pay discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age or disability will not be forever barred from seeking redress because they did not learn they were victims of pay discrimination within six months after the discriminatory decision was first made.

Congress passed bipartisan legislation to enhance the Justice Department's ability to hold human rights violators accountable. In December 2009, the Senate enacted final passage of the *Human Rights Enforcement Act*. The legislation merges two offices in the Department of Justice to create one, stronger, more efficient human rights section. Currently, the federal government has over 1,000 open cases involving suspected perpetrators of serious human rights abuses from approximately 95 countries who are now in the United States. This new section will improve the Justice Department's ability to locate, investigate, prosecute, and/or denaturalize these perpetrators, ensuring that they do not find safe haven in the United States.